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This analysis of the educational crisis in New York City schools discusses some characteristics of de facto segregation in ghetto schools, the social background of Negro slum children, and the failure of teachers and curriculum to educate these students. A large portion of the article traces the various Board of Education attempts to integrate the schools and the response and demands of civil rights groups. A 1-day school boycott called in February 1964, to protest the inadequacy of the Board's pairing proposals may have forced a stronger integration plan from the Board. Although the boycott had positive effects on Negro self-respect, it did not solve the financial shortages faced by the city's school system or the problems of curriculum, bureaucratic administration, poor teaching quality, and the pulls of various pressure groups. Moreover, the boycott did not come to grips with the broader political issue of the need for the amalgamation of Negroes with others in the working class to transform other social institutions. It is felt that educational problems are insoluble unless there is a truly free society which values individuality, creativity, art, science, and knowledge more than it values competition and accumulation. (NH)

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THE URBAN SCHOOL CRISIS

An Anthology of Essays

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THE NEW YORK SCHOOL CRISIS

by Jeremy Larner

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I. The Circumstances

UFT Official: *Why is it we can get young people to volunteer for the Peace Corps to teach in Ghana, yet we can't get them to teach in public schools in Harlem? Answer: Because in Ghana, there's hope.*

Let me start with some statistics. There are 132 elementary schools and 31 junior high schools in New York City whose students are almost entirely (over 90% in the elementary schools; over 85% in the junior highs) Negro and Puerto Rican. In the past six years, while Negro and Puerto Rican enrollment has gone up 53%, white enrollment has fallen 8%, and the number of predominantly Negro and Puerto Rican schools has doubled. Of New York's one million schoolchildren, roughly 40% are Negro and Puerto Rican, 60% "other." Efforts of the Board of Education in the past six years to eliminate blatant gerrymandering and allow some voluntary transfers have reduced by a third the number of schools where Negroes and Puerto Ricans are less than 10% of enrollment. But the problem gets more difficult all the time, as is indicated by the fact that 52%—an outright majority—of the city's 1st graders are Negro or Puerto Rican.

The increase in segregated schools is due to three factors. First, rural minority groups are moving into the city and middle-class urban whites are heading for the suburbs. Second, discrimination, economic pressures, and lack of effective planning confine the newcomers to ghettoes. Third, cautious whites send their children to private or parochial schools rather than "risk" a neighborhood school where minorities predominate. Over 450,000 New York children attend private or parochial schools, a figure that would represent a staggering percentage even for an exclusive suburb.

Thus New York City suffers from an educational problem which it has come to describe as *de facto* segregation. The Board of Education says the facts are essentially beyond its control; the civil rights groups

say they are the facts of a racist society, and must in all justice be eliminated by whatever means possible.

Segregation in ghetto schools is more than racial; there is segregation by economic class as well. Wherever Negro parents reach the middle class, at least some of them send their kids to private schools. Lower-class Negro kids find themselves isolated in schools which are understaffed, underequipped, overcrowded, demoralized, and conspicuously lacking in the mixture of cultural backgrounds which can make life in New York such an educational experience. Many of them are children of parents who are in effect first-generation immigrants from southern and rural areas; for of New York's 1,100,000 Negroes, 340,000 have arrived in the last ten years, 630,000 in the last twenty years. Most of the 600,000 Puerto Ricans have come in the past decade, while the white population has dwindled by 500,000.

Teaching middle-class children the ins and outs of a culture made for them is obviously easier than struggling with ghetto children, most of whom are members of a racial group which has never been allowed to recover from the effects of slavery. Some minority schools have annual teacher turnover rates of over 60%. Some teachers flatly refuse to take assignments in such schools; others drop out as the school year proceeds. Not only is one out of every two teachers a substitute, but some classes may stay without a regularly assigned teacher all year, defeating one temporary substitute after another. One can see that the atmosphere in minority schools is hardly conducive to learning. It is estimated that 85% of the 8th-grade students in Harlem are "functional illiterates," which means that their reading is not above 5th-grade level—in many cases it is much below.

Though some authorities, e.g. Kenneth Clark, disagree, it is hard to believe that the social conditions under which most New York Negroes live are not responsible for some of the difficulty. According to the Harlem Youth survey, whose figures many observers regard as conservative, only one-half of Harlem children under 18 are living with both parents, more than one-quarter of Harlem youth receives welfare assistance, and the rate of narcotics addiction in the area is ten times that for the rest of the city.

By the time they reach junior high school, ghetto children are well aware of their social situation, and it does not exactly give them a feeling of unlimited possibilities. Let me quote from two batches of essays which were gathered at different Harlem elementary schools from a 6th-grade class of "slow" readers (S) and a 6th-grade class of "fast" readers (F). I think the language shows as much about the children—their educational retardation and yet their straightforwardness and toughness—as about the conditions they describe.

> *6th-grade boy* **(F): This story is about a boy namely me, who lives in a apartment in and around the slum area. I feel that other people should be interested in what I have to say and just like me, try to do something about it, either by literal or diatribe means. This book is only to be read by men and women boys and girls who feel deeply serious about segrgation and feel that this is no joke.**

6th-grade girl **(S): I am not satisfeyed with the dope addictes around our block. They take dope in our hallway every night. Another is they break in stores and bars. I am desatifed with the lady that live under us, she set fire to Doris's door. Some dope backs live under us. The lady under us robbed Teddy's aunt for $17.00's. One night a dope addict went cazey in our hally way. They are so many bums in our block. Please help to get and keep them out.**

6th-grade girl **(S): I don't like people going around youing bad Lanugwsh around litter Kide a bearking in Store and fighting and youing dop. And Killing people. And drunk in hallwall. They should stop drink They are teacher the Kide how to Steel I see it alot of tim but I dont pay it no mind I am surrounded by them.**

6th-grade boy **(S): Im not happy about the people who dink. wiskey and go to sleep And I not happy about the peole who come in my hallway and go up stairs and take a neals and. stick there themselve in the arm. I not happy about the people who buy wine and wiskey and broke the bottle in hallway.**

6th-grade girl **(S): the be out there in the hall taking dope and I be freighten.**

6th-grade boy **(S): I deslike the people being hit by cars, the car crashes, pepie fighting, the peple jumping of roofes, stelling paper from the stores, peple picking pocketes, the peple with out thir cubs on dogs and stop peple from taking dop in this naborhood.**

6th-grade girl **(F): (True) What a Block! (true)**

My block is the most terrible blok I've ever seen. There are at lease 25 or 30 narcartic people in my block. The cops come around there and tries to act bad but I bet inside of them they are as scared as can be. They even had in the papers that this block is the worst block, not in Manhattan but in New York City. In the summer they don't do nothing except shooting, stabing, and fighting. They hang all over the stoops and when you say excuse me to them they hear you but they just don't feel like moving. Some times they make me so mad that I feel like slaping them and stuffing bag of garbage down their throats.

The fact that these kids have been encouraged to describe their surroundings is the first sign of hope that they will be able to change them. The school should represent that possibility; it should be a fortress of security in which the children are respected, accepted and developed. Otherwise they are surrounded, as the little girl says; drug addiction, for example, will begin to appear in their ranks while they are still in junior high school —and addiction is only the most dramatic form of withdrawal and defeat.

Looking around him, the young Negro boy will find few "father figures" to imitate; for the men of his world have not been accorded the honorable work men need to earn self-respect. Bitter, confused, withdrawn, violent against one another, lower-class Negro men do not usually last long with their women. The families are matriarchal, the children remaining with their mothers while a succession of "uncles" come and go. There is small hope of that masculine self-respect which is the traditional basis of family pride. The little boy is regarded as inferior to the little girl, and has less chance of survival–by which I mean simply less chance of getting

through life without cracking up, without sliding into some form of self-obliteration.

Dismal to tell, the schools in many ways duplicate the situation of the homes. The classroom confronts the child with the same old arrangement: a woman with too many kids. Far too few of the elementary schoolteachers are men, let alone Negro men. The size of classes, usually around 30 pupils per class, makes individual attention—and thus the development of positive identity and incentive—as unlikely at school as it is at home.

When lower-class Negro children enter elementary school, they are already "behind" in several important respects. In crowded tenement apartments children are in the way from the moment they are born. While the adults of the matriarchal clan unit work or wander, children are brought up by older children, who have reasons of their own to feel impatient or harassed. According to the teacher whose "fast" 6th-grade pupils I quoted above,

> **. . . middle-class Negro kids need integration. But what the lower-class kids need right now is that somehow we conquer the chaos they live in. They have no stability whatever—no family, no home, no one to talk with them. They live in a world without space or time. I mean that literally. Even by the time these kids reach the 6th grade, most of them can't tell time. You can't talk to them about the future—say, about jobs—because they won't know what you're talking about. And when you refer to concepts of space, why you can't talk about "somewhere else," tell how far away another city is, how long a river is, or simple facts of geography. Though they're fantastically sophisticated, more sophisticated than maybe they ought to be, about how adults behave, their mental orientation is almost utterly without abstract concepts. Look: they don't even know who pays the welfare! They don't even know what checks are!**

Of course this particular teacher will get his kids talking and thinking about time and space and jobs and where the money comes from. But there aren't enough like him, and one year of a good teacher can dispel the chaos for very few. The class he has taken such pains with finds itself a year later without an assigned teacher, and the boy who last year wrote a brilliant autobiography is in danger this year of flunking at junior high, breaking down, and spending his high school years in and out of institutions.

Why don't teachers make more progress with these children? Because they are woefully short of books and materials, especially good readers based on the facts of urban life. Because they have to spend so much time on discipline.[1] Because they get poor support from their principals and from the rest of the top-heavy school bureaucracy. But the truth is that most of New York's teachers are too middle-class, too insensitive or too fragile to teach ghetto children successfully. Not that they are worse than teachers in other places, they are simply less suited to their jobs. Not all of them are bothered by their failure; some stay in slum schools

1. Discipline as opposed to socialization. The 6th-grade teacher quoted above reports that with a "slow" class he begins with checkers, and that it takes weeks to get the children to play together without turning over the board and having at each other. Then he brings out the readers.

because apparently it gives them a sense of security to blame the kids for what they fail to teach them. Others, with the best will in the world, are baffled by children who literally speak a different language. One young white teacher, extremely hard-working and perhaps more honest than most, told me after a grueling day,

> **I hate these kids. They're impossible. How did they get this way? I never thought I'd become so authoritarian.**

Most of the teachers are conscientious: that's one of the hallmarks of the professional person. But the manner in which teachers are trained and chosen—which I will discuss below—is practically guaranteed to eliminate those possessing the imagination and flexibility to get through to slum children.

As for the curriculum, it is hopelessly inappropriate. The readers still current in practically every school are those insipid productions featuring Sally, Dick and Jane, the golden-haired cardboard tots from Sterilityville. One could go on by describing a series of tests and achievement-levels, but tests and levels are irrelevant to children who mostly do not pass or reach them. Let me quote Martin Mayer (from his book, *The Schools*) on what our young tenement-dwellers are supposed to be learning by the time they get to high school:

> **In New York . . . the major Theme Center for tenth-grade "Language Arts" is "Learning to Live with the Family." . . . The curriculum guide suggests "round-table, panel, and forum discussions" on "questions relating to allowances, dating, working after school, selecting and entertaining friends, choosing a career, minding younger brothers and sisters, helping with household chores, contributing earnings to the family, decorating one's own room, choosing family vacation places, using the family car."**

But what difference does high school make? The battle is lost long before then. Perhaps it's already lost by the time 1st graders move to the 2nd grade, when only 10% of them are on reading level.

Yet, when all is said and done, are not these conditions surmountable by individual effort? Is it not possible for the majority of these youngsters to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, as so many of their 2nd-generation American teachers say that they or their parents did? Or is this problem unique somehow, does it have to do with the unprecedented oppression and separation of a group that has never in the history of this country been free? Is it really true, as the 1954 Supreme Court decision contends, that "Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. . . . A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of the child to learn"?

In the opinion of this observer, no one could sit for long in Harlem classes without seeing overwhelming evidence of the demoralizing effects of segregation. These children are treated as inferior, just as their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents were—and there is no sense of any possibility that such treatment is ending! In the classroom of a 1st-grade teacher who was a militant supporter of the

boycott, I was surprised to find cut-out pictures of white children used almost exclusively as bulletin board illustrations. Later I found the purified faces of Sally, Dick and Jane beaming out at me in ghetto classrooms of teachers Negro or white, liberal or not: as if to say, these are what good children are like.

> *5th-grade Lower East Side boy* **(F): I have a problem that I am colored. I would like to be handsom but I cant because other people have strait blond hair and they are handsom.**

In a 2nd-grade Harlem classroom the teacher, a lively, intelligent Negro woman, has her kids acting out a nursery tale. In front of the class stands a shy, finger-sucking little girl, her hair in pigtails, absolutely adorable and black. From her neck hangs a large square of cardboard, on which an adult has painted the head of a white girl with abundantly flowing golden hair. Caption: "GOLDILOCKS."

In another 2nd-grade classroom, where well cared-for Negro children are industriously and quietly working under the direction of a Negro teacher, I glance up and see a row of self-portraits above the front blackboard. I count: of 23 portraits, 1 red, 1 green, only 2 brown, and 19 white as the paper they're drawn on.

The sense of inferiority runs deeper than skin-deep. I remember a junior-high-school social-studies teacher trying to discuss the school boycott with his 9th-grade "slow" pupils. Most of them are long since lost; they look as though they have drawn curtains across the inside of their eyeballs. It develops that they do not know the words "boycott" or "civil rights," and to them "discrimination" is something that happens down South. And oh the tortured embarrassment with which they answer questions! From beneath the embarrassment there slinks a kind of arrogance, thriving it seems on the mere fact that the teacher is trying to teach them—as if to say, imagine this fool, asking *me* a question! Whereupon they laugh. They have to. And we are all relieved.

Whether they know the word "discrimination" or not, these kids know they are not worth much to the world they live in. Some of them, all too many, are not worth much to themselves, and lash out in self-hating violence at the nearest target, usually someone who reminds them of themselves. Already the white people of America are beginning to dread the day when these children, as some day they surely must, will recognize their real enemies. As they are at last beginning to . . .

> *West Harlem 6th-grade boy* **(F): Teacher! In the caveman days, if there were Negro cavemen, did the white cavemen use them as slaves?**

II. The Frying Pan

Almost never has the New York Board of Education voluntarily taken steps for greater integration. The highly-touted Open Enrollment program was initiated in the fall of 1960 only after neighborhood school strikes and the threat of further strikes led by Rev. Milton Galamison and Paul Zuber. Open Enrollment is a voluntary transfer program de-

signed ostensibly to relieve overcrowding as well as to integrate. In Open Enrollment overcrowded schools (mostly minority schools) are designated as "sending schools, whose pupils may apply—on an individual basis—for transfer to "receiving" schools in other neighborhoods. The responsibility is on the parents of each child, and the response to Open Enrollment has indicated no desire on the part of ghetto Negroes to rush their children to schools in "better" neighborhoods. To date Open Enrollment busses at city expense only 15,000 children each day. Surely, many of these are middle-class Negroes . . . and whites. A teacher on the Lower East Side whose school is over 95% Negro and Puerto Rican reports that the only ones who left her school in Open Enrollment were ten of the remaining white kids, who bussed daily all the way to Queens.

Even since the 1954 Supreme Court decision, the Board of Ed has never done much to relieve *de facto* segregation unless pushed. The emphasis has usually been on adding "cultural enrichment" to the minority schools rather than on breaking them up. The missionary approach is well articulated by a writer in *Commentary* (January, 1964):

> **The draining away of the white middle classes from the public schools could probably be slowed down by the addition of more cultural opportunities to the curriculum. This, in turn, would still the fears of Negro leaders about racial imbalance.**

Easier said than done. The best-publicized program along these lines so far is the Higher Horizons program (since 1959), which grew from the Demonstration Guidance program (1956). Demonstration Guidance provided extra reading and math teachers, guidance counsellors, materials, and trips to symphonies, museums, etc. for the more intelligent members of a certain high school, with the result that their achievement levels went up considerably, many fewer of them dropped out of high school, and more went to college. But this was only a pilot program which did not reach every child even in the school where it took place. And now that the project is over, that school is depressing to visit: performance seems as low as ever and white children in the neighborhood look for excuses to transfer elsewhere for junior high.

As for the Higher Horizons program, most of the better teachers in the system regard it as a farce. An occasional movie or trip to the museum does not effectively change a child's view of himself or help him learn what he is not learning. And why assume that the official "culture" is truly educational? A Negro teacher told me that the last Higher Horizons film he had taken his class to see was about Jamaica, and every scene depicted Negro servants smilingly waiting on whites. The class didn't like it, though not all of them could say why.

Another enrichment concept is the designation of minority schools as "Special Service" schools. This program involves beefing up school staffs with extra *non-classroom* personnel: psychologists, guidance specialists, and teacher coordinators. The coordinators supposedly gather special materials, brief teachers on the problems of teaching certain subjects, keep records of individual cases, etc. As a rule the Special Service personnel are resented by other teachers. It's hard to believe that they

do a lot of good. Students tend to mistrust the motives of guidance interviewers from class backgrounds different from their own, and to put them on. The NE (non-English) coordinators, who are supposed to help teachers teach Puerto Rican kids English, are not required to know Spanish, and many will explain to you that it's *better* they don't.

It is true, however, that New York has done more for school integration than other cities of comparable size. In Chicago, for example, the Negro sections lie in two long narrow strips, so that it would be easy to pair off overcrowded Negro schools with adjoining white schools. Instead, the school board, as in St. Louis and other cities, prefers to attach portable classrooms to the Negro schools, and this has led to rioting and great bitterness.

In June of 1963, when New York Commissioner of Education, Dr James Allen, called for all local Boards of Education to submit plans to end "racial imbalance" in the public schools, the Board of Ed was not unresponsive. On August 23, Superintendent Gross submitted a plan calling for a free transfer program—wherein *any* pupil in a school with a high percentage of minority enrollment might transfer to *any* school with an empty seat for him, transportation supplied by the city. Beyond that Gross announced the pairing of two junior high schools, some limited rezoning, and a number of studies, advisory groups and community cooperation gimmicks.

The civil rights groups were up in arms. They pointed out that at this rate the school system would never be desegregated. Banding together as the Citywide Committee for Integration, they threatened a school boycott unless greater use were made of the techniques for massive rezoning. These included the pairing of elementary schools (the Princeton Plan), the reorganization of junior high feeding patterns, and the building of "educational parks," i.e. clusters of schools either in central locations or on the fringes of the city, to which thousands of children of all ages would be brought by special transportation. Also, the civil rights groups demanded a "timetable," a guarantee that in a given number of years desegregation would be complete. Otherwise, any plan might amount to lip service.

At this point Dr. Gross evidently felt that his professional competence was being challenged. He was not anxious to confer with laymen or let them have a voice in the planning. Correspondingly, the rights groups were anxious to make the Board assume full responsibility. But as the boycott loomed nearer, public pressure brought the city administration into the act, and the main combatants were brought together in the office of the City Commission on Human Rights, where they signed an agreement on September 5. The boycott was called off, and in turn the Board of Ed agreed to have a tentative plan for integration by December, 1963, and a final plan by February, 1964. Both plans were to "include provisions for a substantial, realistic and working program of integration in every school district in September, 1964."

In essence the December 3 plan was identical with the August plan:

its basic approach was the free transfer program and a study of the Princeton Plan with a view to applying it at some unspecified date to only sixteen schools. There was great stress on beefing up minority schools through special "crash" programs: as a starter, the Board initiated an after-school study center program, to begin immediately, under which some teachers would receive extra pay to help pupils who stayed to do homework or receive extra instruction. As for the timetable, Gross disposed of that with a masterpiece of white liberal rhetoric:

> **Like other cherished aspirations and ideals of humanity, [the timetable] represents a direction rather than a fixed point, and a general movement upward.**

In other words, no timetable.

From that point on, quiet hatred changed to open warfare. Said June Shagaloff, education director of the NAACP,

> **The Board of Education has simply proceeded as if a commitment did not exist—as if the civil rights movement did not exist—as if the Negro community did not exist.**

And Milton Galamison:

> **Gross' interim plan is like saying we're gonna have you and your wife for dinner but not saying when.**

The Citywide Committee, led by Galamison. went ahead with boycott plans. In the middle of December and again on December 31, Galamison led picketing and sit-ins at Gross's office which resulted in the arrest of 62 demonstrators. Gross's office—manned by an extremely able public relations staff—made a big show of conferring with "responsible" parent groups, and staged several open meetings to collect "constructive" opinions from civic groups that had already published their opinions. Meanwhile press and public worked themselves into a frenzy about "bussing," and the notion was widespread that the leaders of the boycott were fanatics who did not really speak for civil rights oganizations.

To open the Free Transfer program, 65,000 questionnaires were sent out to eligible families and only 5,500 applications were returned. Which proved to the Board that Negro parents are interested in improving their neighborhood schools rather than in integration, and to the Committee that it is asking too much to expect individual parents to make exceptions of their kids.

Meanwhile, on January 5, 1964. Gross announced to the press—in language worthy of the pentagon—a "saturation program" for minority schools, involving "task forces" of "hand-picked" teachers, who with the cooperation of universities and teachers' colleges would carry out a program of "reading mobilization." Despite the fact that the announcement carried not a word as to finance, training, methods, probable limitations or starting date, *The Times* and *The Post* flipped over it.

> **NY Times editorial, Jan. 6, 1964: The saturation program combines imagination with good sense. In contrast to the political publicity**

stunts of the school system's critics, it offers a realistic and at the same time dramatic road to improved education for slum children.[2] Such demagogic devices as the projected school boycott and the Public Education Association's "March on Albany" create divisions in the community that impede integration, rather than advance it.

Alas for the PEA! They weren't for the boycott; all they wanted for the schools was money.

III. The Boycotters

The structure of the boycott organization is interesting as a sign of the new forms the Negro movement is taking. The charge that the boycott leadership was not the true Negro leadership was essentially a red herring. The original Committee was formed by the local chapters of the NAACP and CORE, plus the Harlem Parents Committee and Parents Workshop for Equality (from Brooklyn). The local Urban League went along as a supporting member and later the Committee was joined by Puerto Rican groups also. If the opposition—or the reluctant approval—of national leaders like Roy Wilkins was recorded on the front pages, local leaders could legitimately claim the stronger grass-roots contacts. Besides, men like Philip Randolph and James Farmer supported the boycott from the beginning, as did most other Negro leaders from Jackie Robinson to Martin Luther King. That the national NAACP did not participate as strongly as it might have is an old complaint of local-action projects.

Whether or not the boycott represented the Negro people as a whole is another question. But who does represent the Negro people? Who could? Not necessarily the national civil rights organizations, which for years have been run by small cadres of dedicated people, some of them white, who struggle to collect dues from their rosters of mostly inactive members. Yet to read the papers, and to hear the president of the Board of Education, one would think that the Negro could not be "responsibly" represented unless Booker T. Washington dropped down from heaven for a cup of tea.

Not that the leadership didn't have its weaknesses, which stemmed from oversimplification both in the boycott's demands and in the way demands were pressed. Perhaps the most serious lapse was the failure to establish liaisons with liberal or labor groups and to publicize those liaisons. Not until Bayard Rustin joined the Committee just before the February 3 boycott were there any great efforts in this direction.

IV. The Fizzle

While the February plan was being drawn up, a sincere if belated effort might have been made to give the civil rights groups representation among those responsible for the planning of school integration. Instead Donovan chose to confirm their opinion of him.

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2. As of January, 1965, no such program has been put into effect.

Donovan on TV: The grave danger here has been that the responsible leaders . . . are having their leadership threatened by some irresponsible publicity seekers.

Donovan to press: [The Board of Ed] is doing more than those who are advocating freedom now and integration now. [Civil rights leaders are] dealing in jingles [instead of] constructive, practical plans.

The more Donovan insisted that the boycott leaders were irresponsible, the more he convinced them that only the most extreme demands could bring worthwhile results. The only positive event in the final stages of preboycott hostilities was the entrance of Bayard Rustin, Coordinator of the March on Washington, who evidently decided that if this boycott was going to occur, it would be better off with him than without him. He gave the boycott exactly what it lacked: an organizational efficiency which got signs made, statements issued, propaganda mimeographed, volunteers directed. Also Rustin's attitude toward the boycott itself was different from Galamison's, as we shall see.

The Board's final plan was supposed to be announced on February 1, and if it were unacceptable the boycott was scheduled for February 3, the first day of the new semester. Galamison, in order to keep the various member groups of the boycott organizations together, had reluctantly agreed that the boycott would last one day only—would be, in effect, a demonstration rather than a reprisal. Only if the boycott failed to produce significant changes would it be repeated. Donovan, meanwhile, staunchly resisted all attempts to bring the disputing parties together again. Jumping the gun on the February deadline, he took the whole Board on TV January 29 to explain the new plan directly to the people.

The essence of the new "first plan" (as it was mysteriously called) was that 10 out of 31 segregated junior highs and 20 out of 134 segregated elementary schools would be Princeton-planned, and a definite and quick timetable was announced for this. Also, specific efforts would be made to eliminate double-sessions, overcrowding, and school construction in segregated neighborhoods.

This plan drew attack from both sides. The boycotters pointed out that it would leave the bulk of the ghetto schools untouched. The American Jewish Congress—which has been offering "constructive" integration plans since 1957—stated that at least 83 segregated elementary schools could be paired immediately. On the other side, an organization called Parents and Taxpayers prepared to go to court to save neighborhood schools and the purity of their children. Some newspapers criticized Donovan and the Board for going beyond Gross; anonymous board members were quoted to the effect that it would be impossible to carry out this new plan, that there was no money to finance it, and that when the paired schools were announced in March there would be hell to pay.

And the boycott was on. "Even if you don't understand the situation," Galamison appealed, "give us the benefit of the doubt." Few people, black or white, fully understood the aims of the boycott.

No one knew what to expect; boycott leaders were predicting 50,000

absences and were ready to call that a victory. In a bit of brilliant improvisation, Galamison when interviewed on TV pledged that his demonstrators would remain nonviolent, but warned that nonviolent action often attracts "sociopaths" to the scene. The only remedy was for parents to keep their children home. Donovan played right into his hands. Instead of responding with a guarantee of safety for all children attending school, he ranted that he would hold Galamison "personally and criminally responsible" if any child, Negro or white, were injured during the boycott.

On boycott day, whether from principle, fear of injury, or a natural desire to take the day off, 364,000 pupils stayed home. Donovan, missing no opportunity to put his foot in his mouth, was quick to announce that the boycott had been "a fizzle." While the newspapers began deciding he was "not the right man for the job," Donovan was announcing that the boycott would make absolutely no difference in the Board's program or policy. And the civil rights groups began to argue among themselves about just when and how they would take further action.

V. The Aftereffects

What effects did the boycott have? In terms of Negro self-respect, undoubtedly positive. In terms of its own objectives, too, it was successful, forcing a more definite integration plan that the Board of Ed would ever have volunteered.[3] But in other areas the effects were moot.

The Schools

Anyone who knows anything about the New York schools cannot help but be uneasy about the gap between the strategy of the boycott and the situation it attacks. The issue is by no means so simple as Galamison often made it out to be:

> **We feel that if we desegregate the public schools, these other problems—like overcrowding, low curriculum, etc.—will go away. Like when you have an infection, and you take a shot of penicillin.**

One problem that will not go away is that of money. In the 1964–65 state budget, New York City, which has 34% of the state's school-children, was slated to receive only 25% of total state aid to schools. Due in part to the machinations of a rurally-dominated state legislature, the City and its residents pay 49.7% of all state taxes and get back only 37.3% in benefits. The rationale for low school aid is that New York has an abundance of taxable property with which to finance its schools; the catch is that the City also has stupendous upkeep expenses.

To be specific, the value of taxable property per pupil in New York City is $31,878, far above the state average of $26,600; and it is this ratio on which state aid is based. But whereas City taxes amount to $54.27 per $1000 of property valuation, the City spends $39.39 of that money for municipal purposes and only $14.88 for schools—which com-

3. In September, 1964, however, the Board—under pressure from the well-financed P.A.T.—ignored its "plan" and put into effect only two pairings.

pares poorly with what is spent by surrounding districts. Even though the City tax rate is high, moreover, funds collected are minimized by the gross undervaluation of property holdings. Real estate in New York's five boroughs is currently valued at the bargain total of $35 billion; theoretically Manhattan is worth only $13.5 billion—but don't try to buy it if that's all you can raise. Furthermore, much of the non-school bite on New York's property taxes goes to pay for problems that only large cities have—such as the costs of tearing up streets and assigning extra police to direct traffic when property owners decide to pull down or put up new buildings for their private profit. And since current property taxes don't entirely cover the costs of municipal overburden, the City shifts the load to the public in regressive taxes such as the 4% city sales tax.

Financial shortages drastically affect the operation of the schools. According to a study of the New York schools sponsored jointly by the PEA and the UFT, "30% of the daily instructional staff is made up of substitutes and other persons on similar temporary or emergency status." The schools are short by 27,500 permanent staff members, including 12,500 "professionals," who would be required to bring the City up to the *average only* of the school districts among which it once enjoyed leadership. That leadership position was held in the early 1940's, before suburban flight began in earnest, when the City spent more per child than its suburbs did. Now it spends $200 per child less, which amounts to about $200,000 per school and a total of $200 million per year simply to bring the system up to par in staff, materials, textbooks and upkeep.[4] The $200 million does not include extra funds urgently needed for new construction.

At present, there is not enough room, time, or personnel to take care of all the children. A major classroom problem is that one or two children can disrupt an entire class and dissipate most of the teacher's energy; and as one might expect, difficult children are more prevalent in slum schools. According to one assistant principal,

> **It's the 2-3% who are unteachable and uncontrollable—the ones with very deep emotional disturbances—who take so much time and trouble in the lower neighborhood schools. There's no place to put them. We can't even assign them to a "600" [special problems] school without their parents' permission. The "600" schools have no more room anyway. Sooner or later these kids are caught committing a serious crime: you send them to a judge and he sends them right back to school.**

There are also curriculum problems which integration will not necessarily solve. One of the most controversial is the practice of grouping the children according to reading level, and later, IQ test, so that fast, "achieving" children are in a homogeneous group entirely separate from the classrooms of the slow, "non-achieving" youngsters. One of the effects of such grouping is that in schools where a small population of whites

4. New York City school supplies and equipment are ordered from a purchasing manual through a central department which buys from designated contractors *at list price only*—which is often two or three times the every-day retail price at New York's discount houses.

remains, it is in effect segregated vertically in the advanced classrooms. So transporting kids from their neighborhoods will not by itself guarantee them an integrated classroom experience; in fact, since most Negro children lag in classroom skills, it might not do them much good to be thrown in with white children of their own grade level—at least not without drastic changes in the present set-up. Most experts now agree, however, that homogeneous grouping leads to stereotyping of individuals and is not desirable on the grade school level. To quote Martin Mayer, "in New York, Wrightstone's study of comparative performance showed no significant advantage for bright kids grouped with their fellows over bright kids scattered through the school at random." But experts also agree that heterogeneous groupings cannot effectively be taught unless class size is reduced to no more than 15 children, a procedure which would require twice as many classrooms and teachers. For the present, boycotters might take some satisfaction in a provision of the February integration plan, wherein the Board agreed to eliminate IQ tests.

Also beyond the reach of the boycott is the teacher herself, who is often unaware of her middle-class attitudes and the damage they do her ability to teach. I remember one young teacher with an all-Negro "slow" 1st grade, extremely conscientious and worried that she is not more successful, yet unaware that her tone of voice is superior and humorless. At any given moment, only about five of her children are paying attention, and at least three-quarters of the words she utters are devoted to discipline. Let me give some flavor of her monologue:

> **. . . well, why did you raise your hand if you had a pencil? I asked for only those who didn't have pencils to raise hands! That's not funny, Wilma! That's not funny! Boys and girls, we're not getting our work done and if we don't settle down we won't be able to have recess today. NOW I WON'T HAVE ANY MORE TALKING IN THIS ROOM! I'll start over again . . . we draw two lines across and that's the big A. Now I see that Freddy didn't hear me, Becky didn't hear me, Nicholas didn't hear me, Roger didn't hear me. And you're not looking! You can't learn to make the big A unless you're looking! Now can you make a big A? Let's see if you can. Raise hands if you need help. You don't have paper? Deborah, where is your paper? All right, I'll give you more . . .**

After twenty minutes, a majority of the children are making big *A*'s. As the teacher starts on the little *a*, I do what most of the kids want desperately to join me in: escape.

To give you an idea of these kids six years later, here is the teacher of a 7th-grade English class.

> **Now take a sheet of lined paper and write at the top "English notes." I want all of you to copy down right this second the facts I'm going to give you. Norman, would you be so kind as to put your hand down. Now your assignment is going to deal with this, so get these facts accurately. Hurry up, I haven't got too much time.**

The Whites

Naturally the boycott did nothing to ease the growing anxiety of

white middle-class parents. If many more of them withdraw their children, there will be no question of integration.

At an open meeting of a district school board, a white mother stood up and shouted hysterically,

> **What are you going to give me to keep my child in the public school system? I've worked for the NAACP for years, but I don't want 300 years of wrong to weigh upon the shoulders of my 5-year-old!**

The woman went on screaming while her listeners applauded her. It was some time before she could be quieted. Whereupon Mrs. Thelma Johnson, who was onstage as a representative of the Harlem Parents Committee, made the following reply:

> **I offer your child's future. Because your child's future and my child's future are bound up together. You cannot accept the privilege of being superior because you're white any damn more than I can accept the stigma of being inferior because I'm Negro. How much longer must I prove to be your superior in order to be accepted as an equal? Bussing is worth it for me because I'm on the lower end. You have to decide if it's worth it for you.**

Mrs. Johnson, too, was applauded.

The Negroes

Neither did the boycott clear up the confusion among those Negroes who had, as requested, given the civil rights organizations "the benefit of the doubt." Among the children of a certain Harlem school that was empty on boycott day, there was great fear of "integration," for rumor had it that white kids were coming to fight the black kids.

Negro parents, for their part, might well wonder what changes a boycott might make in the depressing economic conditions they face. It would seem, too, that for some the boycott only reinforced doubts as to the value of nonviolent protest in general. Though the Negro in the United States has been historically nonviolent in relations with his white oppressors, nonviolence is by no means the lesson he learns from the life around him.

6th-grade Harlem boy **(F):** *Fable*

> **Once a boy was standing on a huge metal flattening machine. The flattener was coming down slowly. Now this boy was a boy who loved insects and bugs. The boy could have stoped the machine from coming down but there were two ladie bugs on the button and in order to push the button he would kill the two ladie bugs. The flattener was about a half inch over his head now he made a decision he would have to kill the ladie bugs he quickly pressed the button. The machine stoped he was saved and the ladie bugs were dead.**
>
> **MORAL: smash or be smashed.**

Or, as one of the fable-teller's female classmates puts it:

> **I think the white people should stop taking advantage of the color people before they get punched in the face.**

The boycott was a punch thrown off-balance: it brought on all the reaction to a punch in the face without gaining enough of its satisfaction.

VI. Boycott and Politics

> **6th-grade West Harlem boy (F): How come we don't have no Negro president! We have to strike for president! We ain't gonna pay no more taxes!**
>
> **His teacher: We've got to keep these kids from exploding ten years from now when they grow up and can't get jobs.**

One of the conspicuous failings of the boycott was its lack of political content. It was a beautiful example of what Tom Kahn in the Winter, 1964 issue of DISSENT calls "project-centered provincialism" based on "a middle-class integrationist ideology." When Bayard Rustin made his last-minute entrance into the boycott organization, he tried to broaden the perspective. Speaking at a rally January 31, he reminded his listeners that the Negro is at the center of all America's problems; for if America is to solve them, "the lowest must come first."

> **In a country with 50 million poor, only the black people are in movement. But we black people cannot by ourselves solve the problems of housing, unemployment and schools. The only solution is for the working classes to forge a political movement.**

The trouble with demonstrations for limited ends is that the "power structure" can easily afford a compromise which will soon be absorbed in the shifting sands of our profit-controlled economy, without much damage to the status quo. No matter how firmly demonstrators insist that they will not compromise within their area of attack, complete change of one institution is not possible unless other institutions are also transformed.

The unemployment crisis indicates a natural alliance between the Negro and the labor movement: they must jointly demand that a substantial portion of the annual multi-billion defense budget be diverted for education and social reconstruction. Until the problem is understood and attacked on this scale, the local projects of the Negro movement cannot achieve their full objectives.

And yet there was a "revolutionary" ardor to the boycott that went beyond political programs. I say "revolutionary" because at times the driving figures behind the boycott spoke with that appetite for pure destruction which far exceeds the reasoned desire for social reform. It comes from the feeling that the society one lives in is so hopelessly corrupt that one's only recourse is to tear the whole thing down. Let me quote the girl who warned of "a punch in the face":

> **If I could change my block I would stand on Madison Ave and throw nothing but Teargas in it. I would have all the people I liked to get out of the block and then I would become very tall and have big hands and with my big hands I would take all of the narcartic people and pick them up with my hand and throw them in the nearest river and Oceans. I would go to some of those old smart alic cops and throw them in the Oceans and Rivers too. I would let the people I like move into the projects so they could tell**

their friends that they live in a decent block. If I could do this you would never see 117 st again.

At times Galamison, the Presbyterian minister who sends his own son to a private school and drives an expensive car, made statements that would have done justice to Cromwell or Lenin. The most quoted of these was inspired by the radio interviewer who asked him if there was a chance that the integration conflict might destroy the public school system. Replied the Reverend,

I would rather see it destroyed. Maybe it has run its course anyway, the public school system.

By contrast, Bayard Rustin knows what he wants, and hopes against hope it will come about peacefully.

I think we are on the threshold of a new political movement—and I do not mean it in the party sense—that is going to change the face of New York in housing, in jobs and in schools.

After the moral victory of the boycott, however, the only "new political movement" in the offing was a national group coordinating school boycotts in big cities across the nation. If such a development gains further momentum, the civil rights movement will continue divided against itself, exhausting itself in desperate forays.[5]

VII. Society and the Classroom

The subject of New York's schools and what's wrong with them cannot entirely be discussed in terms of more cash, more teaching and more integration. What is needed for the classroom above all else is a free and democratic, truly revolutionary society based on human value instead of compulsive striving, competition and accumulation. Even at best our schools educate our young to fit into a world where ability is measured by quantity only. Concepts of art, science, knowledge, creativity *for their own sake* survive at kindergarten level only; the purpose of an American education is to replace these values with symbols of measure. What can be said of a society which reduces its culture to True-False and multiple-choice tests even on the college level? Among other things, that this society rewards cheating, and that the more advanced the competitors the more extensive and complex the cheating will become, until the cheaters finally cheat themselves of the knowledge of what they are doing.

Our ideal should be schools in which each child can develop as an individual, according to his capacities and desires. A good teacher is someone with a talent for getting through to children and letting them get through to him. If a teacher doesn't in some way enjoy being alive he has nothing to teach. What we need is to replace the authoritarian teacher who has traditionally plagued and scourged the children, whether black or white,

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5. Another boycott in the Spring of 1964 (which Rustin did not join) drew significantly less support from rights groups, parents and students—and no concessions from the Board of Ed. As of January, 1965, Galamison was leading boycotts against designated "600" schools and junior high schools—with no practical success. Sadly, the white parents active on his side are far outnumbered by the busy and vocal P.A.T.

achievers, nonachievers, or underachievers. We need a teacher who will nourish talent and individuality rather than crush it.

Unfortunately, teaching attracts types who enjoy relations where they have undisputed superiority. Thus the effort to "understand the disadvantaged child" turns out in practice to be the science of patronizing the slum-child without feeling guilty about it. For the disadvantaged child, of course, is really not that at all, no matter what it helps one to know about his background: he is a person, and as such something splendid in his own right even before a teacher gets to him.

In every ghetto school I visited, teachers recommended a book called *The Culturally Deprived Child* by Frank Riessman. Reading this book, they told me, had helped them to understand the nature of the children they had to deal with. Sure enough, I found Riessman's book preaching "a sympathetic, noncondescending, understanding of the culture of the underprivileged." But neither Riessman nor the average teacher realize how un-noncondescending sympathy delivered from the top can be:

> **Moreover, self-expression and self-actualization, other aims of education, particularly modern education, are equally alien to the more pragmatic, traditional, underprivileged person.**

No! You just can't talk that way about a child entering elementary school. Kids from "underprivileged" homes want to express themselves and realize themselves just as much as anyone else. Maybe the most important thing for them is to have a teacher who will *expect* something from them, let them know there is some authority who cares. The best teacher I met in Harlem had taken a class of bright 6th graders who up to that time were demoralized and undisciplined. Fortunately he did not assume they weren't interested in self-expression. He assumed that they had something to express, the fruits of their own experience, which is in so many ways deeper and more demanding than that of middle-class children. It was a long haul, after eleven years of neglect, but eventually he got them writing and writing well. He read them French translations and they wrote him parables and fables; it seems Negro children are natural-born fable-writers, for—as we have seen—they are not likely to pull their punches when it comes to the moral. He read them Greek myths and stories, and they wrote him back their own myths, classic transformations, and one boy even wrote an illustrated history of the Trojan War. (One of the transformations begins, "I was transformed from a poor little infant into a nice boy, and as I grew I was transformed into a magnificent extraordinary deceiving nuisance to the world.") Most of the children wrote novels, and one 11-year-old boy, without having read a single modern novel, began a remarkable autobiography with the sentence, "I am dreaming and crying in my sleep."

This was an ordinary 6th-grade Harlem class; there were some high IQ's, but it was not an "SP" (specially gifted) class and had attracted no special attention to itself. The teacher disciplined them, yes, kept them in order, but did it not to triumph but to show them he cared. He respected them, which is something you can't learn from books. He visited their homes, which is absolutely unheard-of. He worked patiently with each child, and got them to work with each other.

Now it is a year later, the kids are dispersed into a notoriously depressing junior high, and most of them have lost what they gained. Some are flunking; their former teacher bitterly wonders how the life in them can survive. But for that one year they produced a body of work uniquely theirs.

VIII. The Grouping of Groupings

If conditions within the classroom are bad enough, to look beyond them is to find oneself in a jungle of stumbling and makeshift, where stentorian voices boom from the tops of trees, and clusters of officious missionaries rush about distributing memoranda on the cannibal problem.

First of all, there is the school bureaucracy. According to Martin Mayer, "New York City employs more people in educational administration than all of France." I believe I have alluded to the public relations men on the Board of Ed staff, but I have perhaps failed to mention the endless associations, commissions, sub-commissions, advisory committees, deputy directors, associate supervisors, district superintendents, coordinators, directors, foundations and independent consultants who must be involved in every policy decision. The trouble with such a set-up is that the basic concern on every level points up, toward impressing the higher-ups, rather than down, toward serving the classroom teacher. Would it be heresy to suggest equal salary for every school position? With the present system, the classroom teacher can be in a panic for materials she ordered three years ago, while the assistant superintendent is sincerely assuring the area superintendent that everything is all right in his sub-sector. In such a bureaucracy, the people who move toward the top are the yes-men, the round pegs, whom the public pays to rise away from the children.[6] They have a priority on operating funds, too; if they could not get their paperwork properly submitted and filed, the system would collapse. In fact, despite the teacher shortage, there are a number of employees listed on the Board of Ed budget as classroom teachers who never report to their assigned schools; they are clerks and typists working in the central offices. Ironically, the policy directives they type, like great portions of our public school funds, may never filter down to the classroom; but they do reach the publicity department, from which they are carefully distributed to the newspapers, which in turn describe to us a school system that doesn't really quite exist. Nevertheless, its paper achievements will be proudly recounted by the functionary flown to a conference of "educators" at public expense. Life in the big city goes on somehow, though where it goes no one knows.

The gap between theory and practice is nowhere more striking than among the school principals. Many of them know little of what goes on in their own schools and make no effort to learn. The job of the principal is to spend his time in educational conferences, or addressing committees, or preparing reports for higher-ups who never come to check. At the Harlem school where the 6th-grade "slow" letters I have quoted were written, the principal assured me,

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6. Gross's 1965 school budget included approximately $5 million to increase salaries for "Commissioners" who make curriculum revision recommendations.

I don't notice any demoralization on this level. The children are happy, well-behaved and eager to learn.[7]

Small wonder that one of the best teachers at this school could not get enthusiastic about the boycott:

What if the boycotters are successful and get the Board to come up with a plan? Who has to implement it but these same shits!

Then there is the problem of the teachers themselves and their organization, the UFT. It would be unkind to expect too much of an organization so urgently needed and besieged with such difficulties as is the UFT. But it must be said that an excessive concern of teachers black and white is their own respectability. The most pressing practical issues are submerged in the desire to preserve their "professional image." For instance, a teacher's license in New York City cannot be obtained unless the applicant has passed the expensive and utterly idiotic education courses offered at teachers' colleges. I never talked to a single good teacher who claimed to have learned anything of value in these courses. Furthermore, they discourage many of the specially talented people gathered in New York City from seeking employment as public school teachers. Bright, educated people who want to try their hands at teaching children can't, not in New York, not even if they have PhD's, unless they are willing to go back to school for their "education credits."[8] Yet the union, although ambitious to work out a joint recruiting program with the Board aimed at attracting Negro teachers from the South, shows little interest in this question. The current teachers' pay scale is based on these pointless credits, and to upset it would invalidate years of useless course-taking.

Finally, there is the conglomeration of civil rights groups, divided and sub-divided within itself, spreading out towards too many separate targets with only the most general slogans to hold itself together. The structure of the rights organizations is chaotic beyond description. Let me say simply that the end effect is too often the mirror image of the bureaucracy they are arrayed against. And the boycott offered no program for the Negro children to realize their own particular talents, no social-action program with which to unite the Negro community in self-respect. Was not the boycott in some sense one more appeal to the great white father to do right by his poor black children?

IX. No Ending

Have I captured the confusion? Here is New York City with a mass of black people, most of whom have never been allowed to partake of our civilization. Now they must be allowed that dubious privilege; for there is no other place for them. In previous eras of American life, there was some room for a variegated lower class, which took care of the dirty work and was not permitted entrance into the cultural mainstream. Little by

7. This principal did not bother to use up several thousand dollars of his alloted budget for equipment and supplies. The kids at this school are short on books and have no musical instruments whatever.

8. Education courses are not the only obstacles in the paths of potentially valuable teachers. Teachers from the South or from Puerto Rico with advanced academic degrees may find themselves disqualified on the interview section of the teachers' license exam for "speaking English with an accent."

little most groups surfaced into the middle class leaving behind among unlucky remnants of themselves a permanent body of American Negroes, who, handicapped by years of slavery and oppression, remained what a Negro teacher describes to me as "a colonial people encapsulated *within* the colonial country." But now automation is chopping away at the colony; we see the natives in the street, shaking their fists. We must open the door and let them in.

The big question is, will they come in having truly changed and purified and reformed our social structure, as some say they must? Will we have to chip away at our stone walls to let them in, as the Trojans did for the Greek horse? Or will the Negro scrape through bloody, bitter and confused, ready to perpetuate the authoritarian ethic he has so far, to his unique credit, managed to evade?

The answer to this question depends in part on our schools. But all school systems are—and have always been—failures. Even Leo Tolstoy, with all his genius, his wealth, his command, and with not a single bureaucrat to hamper him, could not educate his peasants into free men. His failure, our failure . . . the failure is always the same: the failure to educate each man—not for a prestigious "function" or "role"—but to fulfill his own capacities for living, for being alive, for finding and making his own kind of beauty, for respecting the diversity of life without, in his frustration, turning to violence, self-suppression, and the worship of authority.

So what the boycotters are demanding, ultimately (and more power to them!) is a change in the nature of the lives we lead.

6th-grade Harlem girl (S): **I wish that the hold city can chage. and that the governor make new laws, that there to be no dirt on streets and no gobech top off and wish that my name can chage and I wish that whether can trun to summer.**

6th-grade Harlem boy (F): Fable

Once upon a time there was two men who were always fighting so one day a wise man came along and said fighting will never get you anywhere they didn't pay him no attention and they got in quarrels over and over again. So one day they went to church and the preacher said you should not fight and they got mad and knock the preacher out

Can't find no ending.

March 1, 1964